

EuPIA Interview

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The corona pandemic affects many industries. How did the printing ink manufacturers experience the last six months?

I think none of us has ever experienced such a situation before. It is still a challenging time for most of us.

We have experienced a real digitalisation boom in the last six months/last year. This will also be the case more and more in the future. It includes the trend away from print media to online media. While social media, for example, has become an increasingly important part of our daily life, print media has decreased in relevance for many consumers.

In addition, the entire industry has faced special challenges in terms of the global supply chain, for example, a shortage of raw materials led to rising prices in the short and mid-term. Due to the lockdown in many countries, freight traffic is severely restricted in some cases. This, in turn, leads to a bottleneck in freight space. But despite these adversities, there are no significant failures in the supply chain in the industry.

Are there segments that benefit from the situation?

At the start of the first lockdown, packaging printing saw growth because of “panic” buying for FMCG. At some point it reached a certain level, which remains stable. But I do not see a sustainable growth in any segment.

Are there segments that suffer particularly from the situation?

Commercial Printing has definitely suffered as a result of the pandemic. The printing ink industry records a decline in Sheetfed and Web Offset (Heatset/Coldset) and publication gravure. In these segments I do not expect a rebound.

Another segment which is strongly affected by the pandemic is luxury packaging and cosmetics since people have been staying at home most of the time.

When will the industry be able to catch-up to the volumes of 2019?

I think the industry will not be able to catch-up the missing volumes of 2020. Commercial Printing is already experiencing a steady decrease over decades and Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated this decline. We will see a further constant decline. This scenario was underlined by the news in 2020 that the production of the biggest print product worldwide – the Ikea catalogue – was stopped. The only segment which might have a chance of a catch-up to the volumes of 2019 level is the packaging segment.

The pandemic is a health crisis where people are worried about their health. How does the industry protect its workers?

We can state for the whole printing ink industry that we have coped quite well with the pandemic

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so far. We have not recorded any bad case of infection. This is due to our constantly high precautionary measures.

Most companies offered their employees hygiene material (disinfection/sanitizer, masks, etc.) as well as remote working wherever it is possible.

In the laboratory or production, we implemented shift working to minimize the risk of infections.

To ensure a high level of protection many governments implemented strict measures. Did or do they affect the business and what would you demand from politicians?

There were and still are government measures that affect our business. As most trade fairs were cancelled and travel restrictions were imposed, the Commercial Printing business has been the most affected by the pandemic.

But as EuPIA Chairman I can say that all members handle the pandemic very responsibly. We do not wait for the government to impose restrictions. Our actions are driven by our approach to deal with it in the very best effective way to protect our employees and our customers.

Beside the current pandemic: Are there other topics that raise the concern of the industry?

Even if Covid-19 remains at the forefront of our minds throughout our daily professional life, there are, of course, many topics that continue to occupy us. We would like to take these further -also within the framework of our EuPIA association activities.

For example, the topic of availability for raw materials is currently occupying us intensively. Due to the constant expansion of the regulations for raw materials on the part of the EU, we, as printing ink manufacturers, are occasionally required to use alternative raw materials and adapt formulations accordingly which drives costs.

While we in principle welcome the overall targets of the "European Green Deal" as introduced by the EU Commission, our industry will be heavily impacted by certain policy areas of the Green Deal, e.g. the Chemicals Strategy for sustainability and the Circular Economy Action Plan. We are advocating that the measures foreseen by these policies are science-based and balanced.

In addition, and as part of the European Green Deal, the scheduled revision of the Food Contact Material legislation will be of great importance to our sector, as it shall include a new Union legislation regulating the printing ink layer as part of printed food contact materials. The FCM revision is foreseen for the end of 2022 and the preparatory work and our engagement has already started. Since food contact materials are traded across Europe, we welcome a European solution instead of national measures as planned by Germany.

Finally, we are also very curious to see how the Brexit (UK REACH) will affect our market in the long term.